

Additions to the Fern Flora of Saba, Netherlands Antilles

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ABSTRACT.—Recent fieldwork on Saba, Netherlands Antilles, has resulted in the discovery of nine fern species unrecorded for the island. All are known from other islands in the Antilles, as well as from other tropical areas.

Saba is a volcanic island about three kilometers in diameter that rises to about 850 m in a graceful cone called Mt. Scenery. The summit is the highest point in the Kingdom of The Netherlands. Saba lies south of Sint Maarten/St. Martin in the Windward Island chain at the northern end of the Lesser Antilles. About 1,300 people reside on Saba, which is little visited by tourists because of its small size and precipitous, rocky headlands that prevent beaches from forming. A beautiful fringing reef, recently declared a national park, makes the island a choice destination for SCUBA divers, but Saba also offers opportunities for hiking, birding, and botanising.

Although the island has been occupied for more than 350 years, a roller coaster-like road running the length of the island was hewed out of the rock and extensive retaining walls to contain the road were built by hand less than a half century ago. Prior to the road, all travel on the island was on foot, over trails that for the most part run rather circumferentially. Even so, the trails are by no means level because of the lava ridges and valleys between them, locally called guts. A day's hike usually includes elevation changes of at least 500 m. In recent years, additional trails have been constructed on the slopes and to the top of Mt. Scenery to make more of the island accessible to hikers. The road now connects the three principal villages with a dock and jetty at the southwestern end of the island, a minute beach (when it is exposed at all) on the western side, and a very short air field on the northeastern end, which is suitable only for short takeoff and landing aircraft. Ferry boats run from the dock and jetty.

Mt. Scenery is high enough to be covered by rain clouds for much of the time, and the island is therefore more moist than Sint Maarten/St. Martin and other nearby low islands that depend entirely upon convection for their rainfall. The additional water has resulted in a diverse native vegetation that has been divided into five types, which occur at different elevations above the sea as roughly concentric circles: grassy scrub near sea level, dry woodland above grassy scrub on the leeward side, moist forest above these types, rain forest above moist forest, and cloud forest at the summit of Mt. Scenery.